DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 621 EA 028 792

AUTHOR O'Donnell, Lorraine
TITLE Culture and Context: The Border School Principalship.
PUB DATE 1997-10-31
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council of Educational Administration (Orlando, FL, Oct 31-Nov 2, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Effectiveness; Cross Cultural Training; *Cultural Awareness; Educational Environment; Elementary Education; *Hispanic American Culture; *Mexican Americans; *Principals; *Teacher Administrator Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Mexico United States Border; *Texas (El Paso County)

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that examined the behaviors of principals in El Paso County, Texas. The Modified Delphi Technique used two instruments: a questionnaire that was administered to a panel of experts who listed important behaviors for principals in border areas; and a survey based on panel members' responses that was mailed to 4,752 teachers in El Paso County. The teacher survey elicited 1,690 responses, or a 36 percent response rate. Teachers who were more involved with issues of culture, language, and the border experience were more likely to expect that principals demonstrate sensitivity to students' language, culture, and experiences. Teachers who spoke Spanish, who taught in bilingual programs, or who were Hispanic rated cultural sensitivity in principals more highly than did other teachers. Principals should know the expectations that teachers have of them, which may vary according to teachers' own contextual bases. The paper concludes with the following recommendations: (1) principals in any setting need adequate preparation in the areas of climate, communication, community, involvement, management, and instruction; (2) principal-preparation programs should be alerted to teachers' expectations for border-area principals; (3) principal selection should consider the "best fit" between the principal and the school-community context; and (4) study in Mexican culture and language would be appropriate for principals planning to serve in border areas. (Contains 20 references). (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 414 621

CULTURE AND CONTEXT: THE BORDER SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

By
Lorraine O'Donnell, B.S., M.Ed., Ed.D.
Clint High School
Clint Independent School District
Clint, Texas

A paper presented at the
1997 Conference of the
University Council for Educational Administration
Orlando, Florida
October 31, 1997

Doctoral Advisor and Co-Presenter:
María-Luisa González, Ph.D.
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, New Mexico

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. O'Donnell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

EA 028 792

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction and Background

According to the U. S. Bureau of the Census, Mexican-Americans number over 12 million and account for more than 62% of the Hispanic population in the United States. While settling in communities all over the United States, Mexican-Americans have the largest population concentrations in California and Texas (Bean & Tienda, 1987). While Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States, Mexican-Americans comprise the largest sub-group of this population.

Public school educators on the Texas-Mexico border face situations that are unique throughout public education in the United States. The populations of schools located near the border are largely Hispanic, of Mexican-American descent, and many of the students are just entering the United States for the first time (Martínez, 1994). In some cases, students beginning school in border areas have missed a year or more of school in Mexico. Students who reside there find that life so close to the border is greatly influenced by that very closeness, a reality not experienced by Hispanics in other parts of the country: Television and radio programs are broadcast in Spanish; Spanish magazines and newspapers are a commonplace; salespeople speak Spanish (and often only Spanish); and whole communities exist in which the dominant language and culture are those of Mexico (Martínez).

Much has been written over the last 10 years about the critical role the principal plays in bringing about improvement and change at the campus level (Duttweiler & Hord, 1987; Edmonds, 1982; Hallinger, 1983; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, Silins. & Dart, 1993; Rallis & Goldring 1993). While some studies indicate that the link between research and observable principal behaviors has not been clear (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b), researchers have also suggested that a principal is the single most important variable in improving student performance and inaugurating school reform (Edmonds, 1982; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b; Sergiovanni, 1991).

The need for appropriately trained educators is arguably greatest in border areas. For example, administrators and teachers in schools in the

west Texas county of El Paso frequently find themselves trying to communicate with parents who do not speak English; school nurses and counselors express frustrations in trying to contact parents who may have falsified addresses to have their children placed in an American school. Fear of immigration authorities by parents of students often attenuates efforts of school personnel to contact families. Nationally, the dropout rate for Mexican-American students is 40 percent, compared with 12.7 percent for their White, non-Hispanic counterparts (Black, 1989). The changing demographic picture throughout the United States, coupled with the grim statistics of minorities who are not thriving in the current system, requires an analysis of the unique and important behaviors that principals must have in schools with significant minority populations.

The research literature on the principalship reveals several competencies, or constructs, related to principal effectiveness. Almost all of the models include some forms of the following constructs as major points of focus when considering principal effectiveness (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b):

- climate
- communication
- community involvement
- management
- instruction

Methods

A study was completed in 1996 (O'Donnell) whose purpose was threefold: the identification, teacher perceptions, and analysis of behaviors for elementary principals in El Paso County. A panel of experts determined the unique and important behaviors for principals with a majority of Hispanic students. The data from the panel were analyzed and developed into a survey. Teachers in schools with a majority of Hispanic students were asked to rate the behaviors.

One essential objective of the study was to distill the numerous principal behaviors generated by the panel of experts into criterion or dependent variables characteristic of teacher-perceived importance. Factor analysis can be used to reduce a set of predictor variables to a smaller set of uncorrelated predictors (McNeil, Kelly, & McNeil, 1975). Data were

analyzed using factor analysis. Data were tabulated and entered into a computer program for factor analysis to generate a correlation matrix.

Behaviorally Based Assessment. Behaviorally based assessment was used as the basis of this study, because it relies on the critical incidents of job performance to substantiate ratings. Latham and Wexley (1994) point out that the main value of behaviorally based assessment is that it offers standardization of use and terminology--features lacking in trait-based assessment.

Modified Delphi Technique. For the purposes of this study the Modified Delphi Technique used two instruments: (a) the questionnaire that was given to panel members to collect their expert opinions, and (b) the survey that was composed of the items that the panel members generated to distribute to teachers for their perceptions (Paz, 1980). The questionnaire was open-ended and employed a Likert scale.

Behaviors from the panel of experts. The panel of experts consisted of professors of bilingual education, professors of multicultural studies, bilingual specialists, teachers familiar with the area, and administrators from the public schools in the far west Texas area of El Paso County . The panel of experts was asked to list the unique and important behaviors for principals who would serve in border areas such as El Paso, Texas. The panel returned behaviors that were culled to 100 discrete behaviors for border principals. The data from the panel of experts supported the hypothesis that the behaviors previously identified in the research literature would also be in evidence for principals in border areas. Thus, behaviors associated with climate, communication, community involvement, management, and instruction were found among the behaviors submitted by the panel of experts.

The panel of experts submitted behaviors that would indicate a sensitivity to students' backgrounds, culture, and experiences. The behaviors that were submitted seemed to divide into subgroups of language, culture, and geographical awareness. These delineations have not surfaced as such in the extant literature.

It was anticipated that the panel would produce a list of 50 to 60 discrete behaviors. In fact, 116 behaviors were received from panel members. The items were examined in light of the recommendations obtained through a pilot study, and obvious duplications and vague items

were removed, leaving 100 distinct behaviors. Responses were only slightly modified to provide a uniform context for the survey (Hallinger, 1983), and as much as was possible, the terminology of the panel members was retained throughout the development of the survey as an important component of validity (Latham & Wexley, 1994).

Survey. The items listed in the survey asked respondents to rate each behavior as to its importance for principals in border schools on a 5-point Likert scale. Possible responses ranged from "1," (not at all important), to "5," (critically important). The survey was distributed to each of the nine school districts located in El Paso County. The school districts vary in size and demographics, but the entire area is located in the poorest of the 20 regional education service center areas in the state (Texas Education Agency, 1995). The smallest school district has 550 students (Tornillo ISD) and the largest district has nearly 65,000 students (El Paso Independent School District). The vast majority of students are Hispanic and economically disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency, 1995). Two of the school districts, El Paso ISD. and Ysleta ISD, are considered urban, while the other seven districts are located in more rural areas.

Results

The initial distribution went to 4,752 teachers and resulted in a response of 1,608 surveys (34%). Follow-up mailings were conducted and the total response rate represented a total of 1,690 surveys returned, or 36%.

The study supported the hypothesis that a factor reflecting a principal's sensitivity to students' language, culture, and experience would be identified. Indeed, the factor analysis showed that the strongest factor loadings in the exploratory factor analysis for the data set were for this factor. That is, the data identified items related to this factor as constituting Factor 1, the Border Issues Factor. These items indicate a sensitivity to border issues and the implications of those issues.

It was found that teachers who described themselves as Hispanic on the demographic section of the survey rated the behaviors identified in Factor 1, the Border Issues Factor, more highly than did the teachers who described themselves as non-Hispanic on the survey. Also, teachers who participate in the school's bilingual program have higher factor scores for

Factor 1, the Border Issues Factor, than for teachers who do not teach in the school's bilingual program. Teachers who were employed in the school's bilingual program found the behaviors associated with the Border Issues Factor more important as a group than did the teachers who do not teach in the school's bilingual program. Teachers who teach in the bilingual program must, by state requirements, have some Spanish-speaking ability in order to be certified as a bilingual education teacher. Teachers who described themselves on the survey as fluent or somewhat fluent in Spanish had significantly higher factor scores on a factor reflecting principals' sensitivity to students' backgrounds, culture, and experiences (Factor 1, the Border Issues Factor).

The data showed that an increase in teacher fluency in Spanish was related to higher factor score ratings by teachers on this factor. Thus, as ability to speak Spanish increased, scores on behaviors that fell into Factor 1 increased. The more Spanish that was spoken by the respondent, the greater the rating given on behaviors associated with Factor 1 by the respondent. The Scheffé test, a conservative multiple comparison technique to compare differences among means (Gay, 1981), was used to identify the statistical difference between each pair of means for the three cohort groups.

The data do not support the hypothesis that factor scores on a factor reflecting principals' sensitivity to students' backgrounds, culture, and experiences will be greater for teachers with more than two years experience teaching in border schools than for teachers with less than two years experience teaching in border schools.

Teacher respondents whose schools are located 10 miles or fewer from the nearest legal port of entry into the United States rated behaviors associated with Factor 1 more highly than teachers whose schools are located further than 10 miles from the nearest legal port of entry into the United States. The data indicated that the further the teachers were from the nearest legal port of entry into the United States, the lower the factor scores associated with Factor 1.

It was hypothesized that the elementary teachers surveyed would be influenced by the size of their school districts when rating the unique and important behaviors for border principals. A review of the literature (Howley, 1989; Walberg, 1992) indicated that size of educational structures

(classes, schools; districts) does have an impact on students and their experiences. It was hypothesized, therefore, that teachers would rate the behaviors associated with Factor 1, the Border Issues Factor, differently according to the size of the school districts in which they taught. The nine school districts in El Paso County were divided into thirds: small, medium, and large schools districts, with less than 2800 students; 2800 to 15,000 students; and more than 15,000 students, respectively. However, the differences in the responses of teachers from small, medium, and large school districts were not statistically significant. The Scheffé test did not find a significant difference among any of the pairs of means among the three cohort groups.

Educators in the border area of El Paso County did not see border issues uniformly or within the same context, as the factor analysis showed. Hispanic teachers, teachers in the school's bilingual program, teachers who have some fluency in the Spanish language, and teachers in areas fewer than 10 miles from the nearest port of entry into the United States all rated the factor relating to border issues more highly than teachers who were not within these cohort groups, as hypothesized.

Teachers with more than two years experience in border areas did not rate Factor 1, the Border Issues factor, as more important than teachers with less experience in border areas. Also, the size of the teachers' school districts did not influence their ratings of behaviors related to Factor 1, the Border Issues Factor.

Limitations of the Study. Inasmuch as the study was conducted in elementary schools in El Paso County, near the Texas-Mexico border, with student populations consisting of a majority of Hispanics, the results and implications of the study should not be generalized to other groups. Border populations along the coast of Canada, or even schools with student populations consisting of a majority of Hispanics further into the interior of Texas, might yield different results. Indeed, an examination of border schools in New Mexico, Arizona, and California might even yield different results. Results may not be generalizable to middle schools or high schools, even within El Paso County, or to elementary schools with Hispanic student populations of less than 50%. However, the results may be generalized to elementary schools with a majority of Hispanic students

in other border cities in Texas, such as Brownsville, Del Rio, Laredo, or McAllen.

Implications

The issues related to climate, communication, community involvement, management, and instruction, as found in the literature and confirmed by the panel of experts, are among the common concerns of principals in general. However, the data also imply that border area principals in elementary schools in El Paso County should have additional issues and concerns as perceived by teachers experienced with border education. These issues and concerns center around a principal's ability to demonstrate sensitivity to students' language, culture, and experiences.

Furthermore, the importance of the principal's ability to demonstrate this sensitivity will be perceived differently by teachers. Teachers who are more involved themselves with issues of culture, language, and the border experience will look to the principal to provide an example of leadership within the school related to these concerns. This seems to be true for Hispanic teachers, for teachers who speak Spanish, for teachers in the bilingual program, and for teachers who are closest to the ports of entry into the United States. Regardless of whether the district has fewer than 500 students or over 15,000 students, and regardless of the amount of experience of teachers in border areas, these implications seem to hold true.

The study suggested that teachers in the same building will have different, and even conflicting expectations of their principals. Hispanic teachers, and those who speak some Spanish, or who teach in the bilingual program will tend to expect the principal to demonstrate behaviors that reflect a sensitivity to students' language, culture, and experiences (Factor 1, the Border Issues Factor). As a group, these teachers are more alike than they are different, relative to these expectations. Non-Hispanic teachers, teachers who do not speak Spanish, and teachers who are not involved in the bilingual program will not have the same expectations of their principals. They, as a group, did not rate behaviors associated with the Border Issues Factor as highly as did the former group.

Principals might want to interact differently with various groups of teachers. The input of various teacher groups may prove helpful to

border area principals, providing a meaningful perspective for working effectively with various elements of the school community. However, principals will need to keep in mind that teachers will perceive them based on the teachers' own contextual biases, as the study indicates. Principals, wanting to maximize their effectiveness by building a team with faculty members, will want to know the expectations that teachers will have of them. As principals in border areas move from district to district in their careers, the expectations of their teachers may remain the same, even though the size of the district might change.

The results of this study have an impact on the preparation of administrators who will serve in border area public schools. The following recommendations for their preparation are suggested:

1. Principals in any setting need adequate preparation in the areas climate, communication, community involvement, management, and instruction. However, principals who will be serving in border areas need preparation in these areas, as well as in other areas, according to the panel of experts in border education and teachers in border areas.

2. Principal preparation programs in institutions of higher education, as well as school district staff development efforts, should be alerted to teachers' perceptions of the importance of differentiated constructs for principals in border areas.

3. As principals are selected to serve in various areas, "best fit" should be taken into consideration, relative to the principal, his or her behaviors, and the school community context in which he or she will serve.

4. It would seem that principals who plan to serve in border areas need to truly understand the implications of the border context for their students, their faculties, their schools, and their communities, in order to be perceived as effective by their teachers. The traditional exposure to educational theory and management practice, therefore, would not suffice for the principal hoping to serve in a border area, according to the data in this study relative to the perceptions of teachers. Study in Mexican culture and language would be appropriate as related to these expectations of teachers.

Recommendations

A great deal of information is not currently available on education in border areas. Because the needs of students in border areas are so compelling, further research needs to be done. The following recommendation for further research are suggested:

1. The perceptions of principals themselves as to the unique and important behaviors for principals should be assessed. If teachers feel that a principal must demonstrate sensitivity to students' culture and experiences, but the principal does not share this view, no change can take place and the needs of students will remain unaddressed.

2. Additional research should be done in border areas outside of El Paso County and with different ethnic populations and percentages.

3. Members of the extended school community should be included as to their perceptions of the important and unique behaviors for principals in border areas. These may include parents, business people, and other campus staff members.

Summary

Hispanic students, as a group, enter school later, leave school earlier, and are less likely to earn diplomas and college degrees. They are, according to Howe, the most undereducated segment of the population (1994). It is critical that schools respond to the challenges that face the citizens in such areas, providing the sensitivity, understanding, and training needed to unlock the human potential that exists in the rich, biculturally diverse border areas (Martínez, 1994; Texas State Historical Association, 1996).

REFERENCES

Bean, F., & Tienda, M. (1987). The Hispanic population of the United States (for the Committee for Research on the 1980 Census). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Black, M. (1989). Minority student issues: Racial/ethnic data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics since 1969. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Duttweiler, P. C., & Hord, S. M. (1987). Resources for administrator assessment and development (Contract No. 400-86-0008). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 334 62)

Edmonds, R. (1982). Programs of school improvement: An overview. Educational Leadership, 40, 4-11.

Gay, L. R. (1981). Educational research: Competencies for analysis & application. (2nd ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Hallinger, P. (1983). Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals. (Doctoral Dissertation, Standford University, 1983). Dissertation Abstracts International, 54, 5A. (University Microfilms International No. 8320806)

Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1985b). Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals. Elementary School Journal, 86, 217-47.

Howe, C. K. (1994). Improving the achievement of Hispanic students. Educational Leadership, 51, 42-44.

Howley, C.B. (1989). What is the effect of small-scale schooling on student achievement? ERIC Digest. (Digest EDO-RC-89-6). Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Laboratory Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Latham, G. P., & Wexley, K. N. (1994). Increasing productivity through performance appraisal. (2nd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Leithwood, K. A. (1994, January). Leadership for school restructuring. Paper presented to the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, Melbourne, Australia.

Leithwood, K. A., Jantzi, D., Silins, H., & Dart, B. (1993). Using the appraisal of school leaders as an instrument for school restructuring. Peabody Journal of Education, 68, 85-109.

Martínez, O. J. (1994). Border people: Life and society in the US-Mexico borderlands. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.

McNeil, K. A., Kelly, F., & McNeil, J. T. (1975). Testing research hypotheses using multiple linear regression. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press.

O'Donnell, L. (1996). Identification, teacher perceptions, and analysis of selected behaviors for elementary principals in the Texas-

Mexico border area of El Paso County. Doctoral Dissertation, New Mexico State University, 1996. (University Microfilms International No. 8714448)

Paz, E. Y. (1980). Identification of bilingual education Spanish/English teacher competencies. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Arizona, 1980). Dissertation Abstracts International, 54, 5A. (University Microfilms International No. 8320890)

Rallis, S. F., & Goldring, E. B. (1993). Beyond the individual assessment of principals: Schoolbased accountability in dynamic schools. Peabody Journal of Education, 68, 3-23.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1991). The principalship. (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. Texas Education Agency. (1995). Snapshot '95: 1994-95 school district profiles. (Office of Planning and Research). Austin, TX: author.

Texas State Historical Association (1996). The new handbook of Texas. (Vol. 2). Austin, TX: author.

Walberg, H. J. (1992). On local control: Is bigger better? In D. Durrett and J. Nathan (Eds.). Source Book on School and District Size, Cost, and Quality. (pp. 95-116). Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.